

# **ADDENDUM**

## **Mountain Bikers Summary**

Focus Groups with  
Recent Users and Lapsed/Non-Users  
of Texas State Parks  
Contract #177796

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*Attracting Texas Residents to Texas State Parks*

*Conducted for:*

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department  
Austin, Texas

*Conducted by:*



## Mountain Biker (Recent User) Target

### ***Respondent Profile***

A focus group of mountain bikers was conducted July 23, 2007 in San Antonio.

- Ages 25-54
- Ridden a bike off-road on a mountain bike trail in a Texas state park in the past 24 months
- Have ridden a bike off-road at least four times in the past 12 months
- Half moderate and half high interest in nature-related outdoor activities
- 5 Hispanic, 5 Caucasian
- 7 men, 3 women
- Half with children at home

### **Biking Trails: General Perceptions, Usage/Habits and Decision Factors**

#### Perceptions:

- Top-of-mind images when thinking of biking focused on nature, openness, freedom, isolation and peacefulness, and for stress relief and other health reasons.
- Images and photos representing biking experiences of the respondents communicated nature, being away from the city, fresh air, stress relief. All were isolated, but reflected different terrain – rocks, woods, mountains and different levels of challenge.

#### Usage and Habits

- Bikers tend to ride most frequently close to home, such as their neighborhood, nearby parks, lakes or vacant/undeveloped land.
- Garner State Park was frequently mentioned as a park they have visited for biking. Others state parks were Guadalupe, Government, Inks Lake, Choke Canyon and McKinney Falls. Local parks were Mahncke Park and Mission Trails.

*"I usually go to Garner State Park, Inks Lake, Choke Canyon, Marble Falls sometimes. But I like the McKinney Park trails over there by Mahncke Park on the south side. They have some that go all along the river and they're real nice. They're asphalt. They're real nice."*

- Favorite places to ride off-road included in-state parks (Guadalupe State Park, Bandera, and Inks Lake) and out-of-state areas (Illinois state parks, Green Mountain State Park, Colorado).

- When biking in parks, Bikers:
  - Usually do not ride alone, frequently riding with children and/or spouses
  - Want to feel safe
  - Frequently bike somewhere closer to home (often daily)
  - Look for areas that feel open, secluded, away from cars but safe overall
  - Prefer to ride more in the Spring or Fall seasons because of the temperature and beauty of the surroundings

*"I normally go to Government State Park. It's right by my house and nobody really knows about it so there's usually not too many people so it's great. I usually go with my husband and we pretty much go every weekend except lately when it's been pouring down rain. We go there because it's right down the street from us and it's most convenient. We haven't gone on all the trails yet, there's so many up there. It's really versatile for us just to try new things and figure out if we want to push ourselves, more or less."*

*"I consider something where there's not so much traffic. Where you can ride and not have to worry about getting hit by a car. That's the main thing I look for. A lot of times at Garner State Park you're riding on the road and I don't really like that. I like someplace you can ride and not worry about getting hit by a car."*

### Decision Process

- Key factors in the decision process as to where to go for overnight trips for mountain biking include (in order of importance):
  - Accommodations / availability (typically involves camping)
  - Natural setting / seclusion
  - Activities other than biking (fishing, kayaking, golfing)

*"I like a lot of the state parks. Inks Lake I like a lot. They don't have a lot of trails but the trails they do have are really nice. They have secluded areas where you can actually rock climb, go swimming. You can park your bike and walk a little ways down walking trails and you don't have to worry about it being in someone else's way. It's really pretty. It's real nice."*

*"I'd like better camping. Because if we're going to go, we love camping. It'd be great if you could go on a trail all night and the next day you could go on another one. I'm from Washington state and that's all we do is go camping. Here it's really challenging to find a nice campground that's not on a slab of concrete with your neighbors blasting their music. I like to just get away, maybe next to a river, or just by yourself where you can hear the crickets at least. That's the biggest thing for me."*

Other mentions were restroom facilities, bike rentals, variety and level of trails, crowds/size of park (related to seclusion).

*“Garner is really the only place I’ve been to and some of the trails are not convenient for riding and it’s crowded.”*

*“The size of the park makes a difference to me. A lot depends on what plans we’re making but the size of the park represents how much room you’ll actually have when you’re out there. The smaller the park the more the people the more congestion.”*

*“It seems like the trails are where everything is. Most of the trails are in and around the camping areas, but if you had a separate area where you could just ride so you’re not interfering with the campers and they’re not in your way.”*

- For day trips, accommodations and additional activities are no longer critical. Quality of the trails (variety and levels) and restroom facilities become critical.
  - Natural setting / seclusion
  - Variety and level of trails
  - Restroom facilities

Others factors mentioned were signage / marked trails and bike rentals.

- Safety emerged during the discussion, although it was not suggested as a specific factor in the location decision process. Most bikers want to feel safe while riding in areas with less congestion. A few were concerned about safety of children in an area that is too secluded.
- Word-of-mouth (including recommendations from park rangers) appears to be the most popular source of information about biking locations.

*“It’s word-of-mouth. Now that I’m hearing about Woodlawn Park, I’m going to look that up. When somebody tells me specifically it’s good, that’s a big thing.”*

*“To find out other places. Like (sounds like Montgomery Canyon) was closed and we talked to the park ranger and they told us about five other parks within a certain radius that we could go and everything about them. They’re pretty knowledgeable if you talk to them.”*

Other sources include: internet/websites, magazines like *Bike Trail*, *Texas Parks and Wildlife*.

## Texas State Parks

### Awareness and Usage

- This group of bikers seemed aware of nearby Texas state parks.

Most were not surprised at the number of state parks within 60 miles of San Antonio, and together they named 4 out of 9 state parks within 60 miles (Guadalupe, Bandera, Blanco and Lockhart). They mistakenly named 5 state parks as well: Lost Maples, Garner, Choke Canyon, Pedernales and McKinney Falls.

- Favorite Texas parks to mountain bike were Inks Lake (nice water and views), Garner, Government Canyon (convenient location), Choke Canyon (secluded and rougher), Guadalupe and McKinney Falls.

*"Some of the parks you have actual trails that you can actually go out on. Unlike Garner State Park where you've got trails but they're more for walking. You can't really ride your bike on them. There's a stretch around the back where you can take your bike but primarily you're doing a lot of pavement riding. But some parks like Inks Lake have some short stretches. Even Lockhart, which is more a campground, has more trails than I think Lockhart does that you can use for your bikes. I like it to be clear so you can get through. You know, a bike path instead of a walking path. A walking path you can get by with less space without the brush getting in the way. With the bikes you can't."*

A few preferred the rougher, "unmarked" trails, although they admitted these might not be the safest.

*"I like Inks, but I like Garner as well and Guadalupe. But one thing I'd like to add, in all these state parks some of the best trails are unmarked trails that come off a paved road or a paved trail that guests have made on their own. They're not safe, but they're the best trails."*

- They also mentioned and agreed that distance to the park is becoming more important with increasing gas prices (although price did not emerge as a factor in the decision process discussion).
- Almost all consider state parks when looking for a place to go biking, but almost exclusively for overnight trips rather than day trips.
- Mountain biking did not seem to be their primary association with state parks – most go primarily for camping, but take their bikes and gear. And biking is not the only activity of interest when visiting a state park. Other activities include water activities like boating, swimming, and fishing along with golfing and walking/hiking.

*"Like golfing or putt-putt. Do they have other types of activities because mountain biking is great and we enjoy it when we go there, but that's not the only thing we do."*

*"For me, mountain biking is usually secondary or maybe third." (agree)*

*"When we go, we go primarily for camping. That's the main reason that we go but our main activity is mountain biking so we take all our gear."*

### Image of Texas State Parks

- Top-of-mind thoughts of Texas state parks included: availability (lack of), what will the weather be, family-oriented / quiet fun, some have biking and walking trails.
- Satisfaction with state parks was low to moderate. Mid to low satisfaction was attributed to lack of marked trails, less variety and levels of trails, inappropriate behavior by other visitors, and trash.

Those who had visited out-of-state parks for mountain biking were less satisfied with Texas state parks by comparison.

*"In terms of the composition of trails that we talked about. You don't have a lot of variety and different levels of trails. I go other places like out-of-state, or I go to bases a lot and a lot of them have campsites and bike trails. And they have things that are posted trails, things that are marked. That makes it more convenient for us to go."*

- Some of the positives of biking in state parks include:
  - Beautiful scenery
  - Getting away in nature
  - Challenging
- Negative experiences and perceptions of Texas state parks included:
  - Lack of cleanliness, especially in bathrooms and "trash areas"
  - Reservations unavailable, having to book months in advance for overnights
  - Lack of variety and composition of trails
  - Inappropriate behavior, "rowdy" people in the park at camp sites

### Increasing Usage of State Parks

- Most suggestions to increase usage of state parks did not focus on biking trails. Instead, suggestions were made for:
  - Activities/offer a variety of things to see and do
  - Availability – more cabins or camping sites ("you can't get in")
  - Better communications ("if I knew what was going on I'd go more")
  - Cleaner parks, including restrooms (soap and toilet paper) and trash areas
  - Improving trails, such as signage, lighting at night, drinking water throughout the park

*"Other activities available. We look for is there a lake, can you go fishing, or canoeing, can you rent a kayak or a pontoon?"*

*"It varies. It seems like depending on the region you have different activities. For example, at Lockhart, if you're into golf, that's the best place to go because they have a golf course. But besides the golf course, some walking Trails, and maybe a bike trail or two, there's not a whole lot of other things you can do. They've got a little creek there, but there's not a lot you can do. So if you're into golfing, that's where you're going to go. If you're into mountain biking or boating, you go to Inks Lake. So it depends on what you have in mind. You don't have a bunch of activities all in one spot. You think about what you and your family like to do, and then you look on the website and see which ones are available at which one. Based on word-of-mouth from people who've been there, you find out about the quality."*

*"There's more to do than just one thing. If you're going to bike ride and it's crowded, you can go fishing, or walk on a walking trail. You want to have variety because if it's crowded in one spot you could go some place else and do something else."*

*"I have a big issue with that. If the restrooms are dirty I just don't want to go back and I will remember I don't want to go to that place because that restroom was filthy." (agree)*

*"I think of availability because you can't just go. Everything's always booked. With a state park you almost have to go a year ahead in advance and book it. You just can't go...so it's availability. state parks."*

*"Whether it's family oriented. Sometimes they can get really rowdy in some areas. I've been to some that I just thought it was more for the party animal and not for the family."*

*"I only went once within the last 12 months to a state park and my things are also the planning that it takes to do that, just having to do everything in advance and having the weather be a factor. It's not something I would consider if I'm going to do it often." (agree)*

- Increasing and promoting activities received substantial support among Bikers.

*"If I know what's going on I would go more. But I don't hear what's going on unless I go look for it. But if it came out on the news I'd think about going there the next week."*

Activities that targeted all age groups and offered variety and options for park users were desired. In addition, communicating that information about the activities to the respondents was critical.

Specifically, some of the activities suggested were:

- Water activities (swimming areas, boating, paddle boats)
- Guided tours with rangers or staff, several times throughout the day
- Dances and cook outs
- Playgrounds, basketball and tennis courts
- Craft classes
- Religious services

- Word-of-mouth along with the Internet/Texas state park website were the top information sources for mountain biking in state parks.

*"It's word-of-mouth...When somebody tells me specifically its good, that's a big thing."*

*"There are so many state parks out there that are really nice that I don't know about and the way I found out about Inks was just word-of-mouth. Someone knew about it and put it together, we went and had a great time."*

- Suggested communication tools were also varied. Email updates tended to be most important (3 currently used this feature). A suggestion was made to sign up for the email alerts at park registration, not just on the website.

Other suggestions included:

- Advertising (billboards, pop-up on related web sites, TV)
- Television segments highlighting upcoming events and activities
- Monthly event lists on flyers at the library
- Ads re upcoming events in newspaper or magazines
- Information flyers at park entrances
- Talks by park rangers at schools

*"If there was some information to see what was available at the entrance, like a flyer, about what was going on, sure."*

*"What it is with state parks anywhere, is that you really have to look on the internet, in magazines, the newspaper, you've got to dig to find out's going on. The information is not coming to us, we've got to go look for it."*

## Reactions to Concepts

*Note: Respondents were made aware that there are a number of state parks within 60 miles, which may have contributed to higher interest.*

### Yurts (with air conditioning)

- Interest in Yurts was high among Bikers, with well over half indicating strong interest. Those who indicated strong interest in yurts cited the benefit of air conditioning (particularly for women/wives), convenience and ease of not having to set up your own tent, and it would be more comfortable. They would expect to pay \$25 to \$50 per night.

### Group Facilities

- Interest in renting a group facility was strong, with over half highly interested in the facility for a variety of meetings: family reunions, weddings, company meetings/picnics, church/ministry retreats and team sports. Expected rental fees typically ranged from \$100 to \$200 per day.

#### Outdoors Workshops

- Participating in outdoors workshops received a positive response with almost half expressing interest. Fees were expected to be \$5-\$10 per person.

This was described as a chance to learn new skills (“you don’t know everything”) and a fun activity that could be shared together as a family.

#### Summer Camps (Day Camp)

- Two hikers were interested in a weeklong summer day camp offered at state parks. This was perceived as good for kids and would get them outside and it would be something different from daycare at about the same price. They would expect to pay \$100 a week.